

SELF-CARE FOR FEWER HEADACHES



If you're one of the 15 per cent of US adults who suffers from severe headaches or migraines, or one of the 18 per cent of people who suffer from headaches multiple times a month, you're probably looking for ways to reduce their severity and frequency. Here are a few tips to help you manage your headaches a little better.

GET A TREATMENT PLAN

Don't take over the counter pain medications any more than twice a week; if you're dealing with frequent headaches you should consider seeing your healthcare provider for a treatment plan.

TRY TO REDUCE STRESS

Stress can exacerbate headaches in many people, so if you feel the emotional stress starting to build up, turn to some deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation techniques before it triggers the bad head. Remove yourself from the source of emotional stress if at all possible. As soon as you begin to feel your stress levels rising, stop - take several deep breaths and count to 10 slowly.

GET SOME EXERCISE

Exercise releases endorphins and other feel good chemicals that can help to block pain signals to your brain. Find a form of exercise you enjoy and take it slowly; exercising too strenuously can sometimes trigger a headache. Exercising three times a week can help to reduce the frequency and severity of your headaches, and if you already have a headache, exercise may even help relieve the pain.

REDUCE CAFFEINE

While caffeine in small doses is thought to help relieve headaches (it's in some painkillers) if your daily intake of caffeine is more than 400 milligrams it can cause them instead. Watch your regular intake; too much caffeine on a regular basis makes you prone to headaches but giving up is also likely to give you a sore head so cut back gradually.

REDUCE MUSCLE TENSION

Tension build up in your muscles can trigger headaches, so if you feel the stress in your neck and shoulders, get a massage, or do it yourself: massage your temples, scalp, neck and shoulders with your fingers. Neck and shoulder stretches will help diffuse physical tension, too, and reduce the opportunities for a headache to develop.

HEAT AND COLD

As soon as you feel the tell tale signs of tension headache starting to develop, apply heat with a compress or hot water bottle, or if you can, take a warm bath or shower. If a physical stress related headache starts to come on, an ice pack wrapped in a cloth or a cool washcloth across your forehead helps.